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ABSTRACT

Land use controls are often a major point of conflict between recent migrants and long-term residents of rapidly growing communities. Such conflict was noted in a case study of a rural community undergoing rapid population growth. The revision of a comprehensive land use plan for the community provided the opportunity to evaluate citizen perceptions of the consequences of growth and their attitudes on land use controls and zoning. Responses of oldtimers and newcomers on these issues were compared. Data was gathered from two sources: a 20% sampling of county residents received a mailed closed-ended questionnaire on citizen's concerns and needs; 50% responded. Additional data was provided by observations of a series of public forums and citizens advisory committee meetings designed to develop goals and objectives for the land use plan. Both newcomers and oldtimers valued the rural qualities of the area, supported management of population growth, and expressed concern about the public costs of growth, especially the ability of the community to provide public services to an exploding population. Although noneducational public services (especially water and sewage disposal) had been seriously strained, it was within the area of educational services that the pressure of numbers was most apparent. Newcomers and oldtimers, however, differed significantly in their views on continued industrial development, urban development of agricultural lands, and the limits on public infringement on private property rights. (Author/DS)

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RAPID POPULATION GROWTH AND RURAL COMMUNITY CHANGE:

A FOCUS ON LAND USE ISSUES*

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ABSTRACT

The paper presents a case study of a self-defined rural community undergoing rapid population growth and recently redefined as part of an adjacent SMSA. The revision of a comprehensive land use plan provided an opportunity to evaluate citizen perceptions of the consequences of growth and attitudes on land use controls and zoning, and to compare newcomers and oldtimers on these issues. A 20 percent sample of county households, stratified by place of residence received a mailed closed-ended questionnaire. A response rate of 50 percent yielded an N of 640. This data was supplemented with observation of a series of public forums (8) and citizens advisory committee meetings (15) designed to develop goals and objectives for the land use plan. Results indicate a dominant image of the community as a "rural place" and strong support for managing the rate of population growth. Newcomers and oldtimers, however, differed significantly in their views on continued industrial development, urban development of agricultural lands, and the limits on public infringement on private property rights. Landuse controls are a major point of conflict between recent migrants and long-term residents in rapidly growing communities.

*Paper prepared for presentation at the annual meetings of the Rural Sociological Society, August 23-26, 1979. The investigation reported in this paper (No.) was conducted in connection with a project of the Kentucky Agricultural Experiment Station.

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Introduction

Two major trends are underway in America, one is a "quiet revolution in land use planning" (Geisler, 1978), and the other is a geographic revolution in the spatial location of the nation's population (Beale, 1975; Zuiches, 1977). The temporal intersection of these events has generated considerable conflict in many communities, as residents struggle to redefine property rights in the face of growth-based changes in land use patterns.

Land use controls have their origin in the urban experience at the turn of the century. Massive in-migration, rapid industrialization and urban sprawl created a nightmarish urban landscape of incompatible land uses. Enclaves of wealthy white urbanites found themselves beseiged by the sprawling of racial or ethnic tenement slums, or undesirable industrial operations (Delafons, 1969). The success of merchants on New York's Fifth Avenue in halting the encroachment of the garment district through zoning laws stimulated the proliferation of zoning as a mechanism of land use control. In 1926, 564 cities had zoning

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ordinances and by 1970 over 9,000 municipalities and townships had adopted regulations (Coke and Gargan, 1969).

Zoning regulations permit a governmental unit to differentiate land by uses and provides a "legal basis for separating incompatible 'higher' from 'lower' uses of land in the name of the general welfare of the community" (Geisler, 1978:16). Generally, land use plans and their accompanying zoning regulations have been the tools by which urban governments have managed and directed urban growth. Thus, a preponderance of land use planning activity has an urban focus (Erickson, 1975). However, over the last two decades, rural land use planning has become an important socio-political issue, albeit infrequently researched (Erickson, 1975; Long et al., 1977). The concern and activity in rural land use planning is directly attributable to another major trend.

The recent surge of population growth in nonmetro counties is well documented (Tucker, 1976; Fuguitt and Beale, 1978). Nonmetro counties have experienced major shifts in their historical demographic patterns due to (1) a growing stream of migration from metro to nonmetro areas accompanied by an increasing residential preference for nonmetro places (DeJong, 1977); (2) an increased ability to retain residents (Wardwell, 1977); (3) expanded employment opportunities which enhance the attractiveness of nonmetro communities (Petrulis, 1979); (4) the emergence of nonadjacent nonmetro growth centers, frequently focused on educational, recreational or retirement services (Beale, 1975); and (5) spillover urban growth into adjacent nonmetro counties stimulated by improvements in national transportation systems. In addition, some nonmetro counties have been absorbed by neighboring metro areas through annexation or administrative redefinition of their status (Beale, 1975).

A major consequence of this population growth in formerly rural areas is seen in the changing pattern of land use. Agriculture has been most affected, with Zeimetz et al (1976) estimating that .173 acres of rural land move into urban uses for each addition to the nonmetro population. The leap-frog development of suburban communities into adjacent nonmetro areas has led to skyrocketing property taxes in many communities placing an inexorable pressure on farmers, especially those with marginal holdings. In other cases, land use controls in metro counties which set minimum size requirements for development, may stimulate the construction of subdivisions in adjacent counties which have no land use controls (Erickson, 1975). As a result, land use plans and their enabling zoning regulations are becoming a focus of socio-political discussion--and conflicts--in hundreds of rural communities across the nation.

Social scientists have begun to examine the consequences of rapid population growth on rural community change. Both Graber (1974) and Ploch (1977) document major changes in rural communities as newcomers swell the population and alter the composition of local social structures. Ploch (1977) suggests newcomers and oldtimers collide over definitions of the quality of services, and continued economic development of the area. Graber (1974) indicates, on the other hand, that newcomers may form coalitions with some groups of old residents to either initiate social change or deter continued development. Both authors comment on the centrality of land use issues in the debate over rural community change. More popular publications have also noted the growing conflict within communities over land use issues (Neugeboren, 1979; Hazlett, 1979), which suggests that land use planning may be a central factor in rural community change in the coming decades.

This paper explores the impact of rapid growth on a community which has historically defined itself as "rural." Two sources of data will be utilized: first, a county-wide survey of households provides quantitative

evidence on perceptions of and attitudes toward growth impacts. Second, participant observation of a series of citizens advisory committee meetings to design a comprehensive land use plan, and the public hearings on the proposed plan provides qualitative evidence on these growth issues. Land use planning and zoning regulations seem to be pivotal issues in Kentucky counties and rural counties across the nation (Graber, 1974; Ploch, 1977; Fleischman, 1978). Planning and zoning tap critical dimensions of the social definition of reality in terms of land ethics; public vs. private rights and responsibilities, values on freedom, progress and growth; and, consensual perceptions of the nature of the community. As a result, the development of a comprehensive land use plan with its enabling zoning regulations offers a focal point for analyzing (1) how residents of a growing community respond to the changes accompanying growth and (2) how newcomers and oldtimers perceive the benefits and costs of growth and planning.

The Setting

Agrarian county is adjacent to a rapidly growing metropolitan area in the east south central United States. Agrarian county's population has soared since the '60s, and in 1972 was reclassified as part of the expanding Standard Metropolitan Statisitcal Area of Metropolis. Reflecting a national pattern of urbanization, during the last seven years the rate of population growth in Agrarian county has exceeded that of Metropolis as both people and businesses seek more "ideal" locations (whether economic or qualitative) (Table 1).

TABLE 1
DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE IN AGRARIAN AND METROPOLIS COUNTIES

	Agrarian		Metropolis*	
Components of Change	1960-1970	1970-1976	1960-1970	1970-1976
Rate of Population Change	28%	25%	32%	8%
Net Migration	2310	3200	22,000	3300
Percent Net Migration	17%	18%	17%	2%
Natural Increase	1500	1200	20,200	10,600

*Central County only.

Several important changes in Agrarian county have occurred as a result of this rapid rate of growth. These changes are representative of those taking place across the nation in hundreds of "Agrarian" counties. Land is being converted from agricultural uses to residential, commercial or industrial use through rezoning or annexation. For example, the largest incorporated community in Agrarian county has expanded its "urban services area"[1] by nine square miles since 1971. A study of rapidly growing counties in the U.S. (Zeimetz et al., 1976:8-11) recently found nearly 25 percent of the cropland and 40 percent of the pastureland in the surveyed counties converted to urban uses. Even within those areas designated as agricultural zones, "baby farms" or "farmettes" (5 acre lots) are springing up throughout Agrarian county, but especially in those areas near Metropolis. Hence, the patterns of land use have changed significantly in the last decade due to a 27 percent increase in housing units and growth in the industrial sector.

Noneducational public services, especially the delivery of water and sewage disposal have been seriously strained. The current landfill site in Agrarian county has failed to consistently meet state standards and is projected to last only four more years. Utilization of the landfill is not only by Agrarian county residents, but also private companies in Metropolis truck their solid waste to the landfill. The water systems in Agrarian county have been strained to--and sometimes past--the breaking point, and the two major systems have been operating at capacity for several years.

It is within the area of educational services that the pressure of numbers is most apparent to the observer. Agrarian county schools have experienced a 20 percent increase in the school population in six years, and a 33 percent increase in the size of the academic and administrative staff. In planning, a school facilities utilization rate of 90 percent is considered excellent;

all of the Agrarian schools have a utilization rate in excess of 110 percent, and the elementary school is at 155 percent. Expansion of facilities is partially supported through state funds for capital construction, but since this meets only about one-fourth of costs, additional bonded indebtedness will be necessary.

Rapid population growth in Agrarian county has changed many aspects of community life. One of the most significant transformations is in the area of land use planning. Prior to 1970, comprehensive land use planning had met stiff resistance in Agrarian county. In the late 60's however, two events reduced the opposition to land use planning. First, a large mobile home park was developed in the northern section of the county, and second, a sewage treatment plant to serve Metropolis was constructed in the same location. These two events precipitated the passage of enabling legislation for comprehensive land use planning. In this case, the adoption of land use planning was a response to the perceived negative consequences of growth and an attempt to control its "undesirable" aspects. State law requires reevaluation of land use plans every five years and Agrarian county is now engaged in this process.

Sources of Data

The Planning Commission of Agrarian county endeavored to maximize citizen input in the development of the comprehensive land use plan. A variety of methods were utilized to insure citizen input including a series of Public Forums designed to (1) inform the public of demographic and economic changes in Agrarian county since 1970, and (2) obtain citizen comments on issues facing the community. The forums, held at locations throughout the county were attended by 280 citizens. Two Citizen's Advisory Committees developed goals and objectives for the comprehensive plan through a series of meetings to which the author served as a consultant. These committees had representatives from community organizations, the different geographic areas of the county,

and special interest groups (developers, large farm operators, real estate agencies).

Finally, citizens concerns and needs were assessed through a survey of 20 percent of the households in Agrarian county. The sample was stratified by geographic location in the county--the two incorporated places, and the unincorporated areas of the county. The response rate, following a postcard and second mailing, was 640 (52 percent), or an estimated sampling of between 10 and 13 percent of the households in the three geographic subunits of the county.

Thus, both quantitative and qualitative sources of data can be utilized to examine how the residents, both newcomers and oltimers, view the social and economic consequences of population growth.

Citizen's Perceptions of Growth Impacts

While government agencies administratively may define Agrarian county as part of the Metropolis SMSA, the residents provide a different picture of their community. A theme common to the various meetings was a desire to preserve "the symbolic meaning of Agrarian county in the lives of its residents," or its "rural way of life." While most people agreed that agriculture was not a major industry in Agrarian county, they also concluded that "we are a farm-related community since we receive a lot of satisfaction from agriculture." The survey results echoed these sentiments. The two most important reasons cited for living in Agrarian county were it is a "smaller community" (52 percent) and it is "less crowded" (49 percent).[2] The respondents' selection of a preferred place of residence substantiated this preference for "country living" since 8 out of 10 selected either a town smaller than 10,000 or the open country.[3]

Thus, the people of Agrarian county shared a consensual definition of their community based on traditionally "rural" aspects of life--a smaller, less crowded community suitable for raising a family. This verifies findings

by Graber (1974), Thomas and Bachtel (1978), Blackwood and Carpenter (1978), and Mileti, Piernot and Hanna (1978) and suggests that Blackwood and Carpenter's analysis of the role of "anti-urbanism" in residential preferences must be explored more seriously. Recent growth in Agrarian county has not altered this image of the community, in fact it could be argued that growth has intensified the identification of Agrarian county as rural.[4]

This image of a rural community is threatened by recent population growth, which most participants in the forums attributed to their urban neighbor. The citizens of Agrarian county see a clear link between events in adjacent Metropolis and patterns of growth within their own community.

> Don't let the expansion of [Metropolis] run roughshod over us. I'd like to put up a wall at the county line and forget all about [Metropolis], but I can't, they won't let me.

The construction of the sewage treatment plant in Agrarian county to service the needs of Metropolis was frequently cited to illustrate the residents' belief that their large neighbor sees Agrarian county only as a dumping ground for its excess population and urban problems (mobile home parks, landfills, etc.). The survey results corroborated the reality of this linkage between Metropolis and Agrarian county, if not the symbolic meaning attached by the Agrarian residents. One out of every two persons in Agrarian county commuted to work in Metropolis, and, one of every four respondents had moved to Agrarian county from Metropolis. Population growth in Metropolis affects the pace and nature of change in Agrarian county, and is seen as the root of many community problems.

The survey of county residents included an assessment of community services and issues facing the community. Citizens expressed a concern with the public costs of growth, especially the ability of the community to provide public services to an exploding population, and the extensive loss of agricultural land to urban uses. The "report card" on services pointed to recreational

programs and facilities, traffic, and education as major community concerns. Many feel these problem areas are directly attributable to recent growth, and a public hearing on a zone change request to permit a subdivision development illustrates this perception. The request to rezone 209 acres from agricultural to residential use led to an 8 hour public hearing, and a denial of the request primarily due to the development's impact on the school system. The hearing was unprecedented in Agrarian county's history, but proved to be the first of many such confrontations within the community over the issue of growth management.

The participants in the survey and public meetings expressed a strong support for a community plan to manage growth. Six out of 10 survey respondents wanted to see the county's population grow only a limited amount in the near future and 3 out of 10 wanted the population to remain stable. This often focused on a need to "restrict the growth rate to the availability of services to support those persons"--or development phased to capital improvements in the services delivery system.[5] Those favoring managed growth then, pointed to two advantages:

- a phasing of growth to the ability of the community to provide services, and
- controls on the rate of conversion of agricultural land to to urban uses.

While newcomers and oldtimers agreed on the desirability of controlling population growth, they differed significantly in their evaluations of industrial expansion (Table 2). Newcomers were more likely to rank the attraction of new industry to Agrarian county as very important, perhaps because fully half of the newcomers commute to Metropolis. Since traffic congestion is the major community problem, commuting newcomers may view industrial development as a solution to daily commuting problems.

TABLE 2

A COMPARISON OF NEWCOMERS AND OLDTIMERS

ATTITUDES ON GROWTH IN AGRARIAN COUNTY

(N = 585)

Growth Issues	Newcomers	Oldtimers
1. Would prefer to see the population of the county	100%	100%
grow as much as possible	11.7	8.1
grow a limited amount	64.8	58.0
stay the same	23.5	33.9
2. How important is it to attract new residents to the county?	100%	100%
Not at all important	54.2	55.9
Somewhat important	34.8	32.3
Very important	11.0	11.8
3. How important is it to attract new industry to the county?	100%	100%
Not at all important	30.7	30.4
Somewhat important	43.4	52.5
Very important	25.9	17.1
	Sign. .05	2DF

While there was a general consensus on preserving the "rural way of life" in Agrarian county by developing a plan to manage the rate of population growth (75%), there was less unanimity on the means of accomplishing this goal. Conflict occurred over the nature of the land use plan, and a general dissatisfaction with zoning. It is important to note first, that there was a general consensus among participants in the forums and the survey that some controls on the location of industries and subdivisions had to be established. Disagreements occurred as to the criteria to be used in designating appropriate land uses. Large landowners in Agrarian county vigorously opposed the expansion of minimum lot requirments and the creation of different agricultural zones and uses. While heartily endorsing the significance of agriculture within community life, these individuals saw strict agricultural land use regulations as a threat to their opportunity to participate in the economic expansion of Agrarian county. Newcomers and oldtimers also differed significantly in their opinions on this issue (Table 3), perhaps reflecting the larger group of farmers among the oldtimers.

Perhaps the key to the disparity between the desire to manage growth and the ambivalence as to land use controls and zoning is found in the nature of the issue. Land use controls strike at the heart of private property rights, one of the most zealously guarded and controversial rights in politics and law. This issue is best illustrated by one respondent who stated:

> If a man buys and pays for his property he should be able to do anything or build anything he likes.

This issue clearly differentiates newcomers and oldtimers (Table 3). Oldtimers are more likely to believe that the use of private land should be based on the owner's decision rather than some formulation of "the public good." They are also more likely to state that Agrarian county has had too much planning and zoning in recent years. In public hearings on the proposed

TABLE 3

NEWCOMERS AND OLDTIMERS ATTITUDES

IN LAND USE PLANNING AND ZONING

(N = 585)

Issues	Newcomers	Oldtimers
1. This community should develop a plan to manage the rate of population growth.	100%	100%
Strongly Agree	48.7	48.5
Agree	27.2	25.9
Undecided	15.8	11.3
Disagree	4.8	9.0
Strongly Disagree	3.5	5.4
2. If more industries move into this community they should be restricted to an industrial park area.	100%	100%
Strongly Agree	47.2	47.5
Agree	32.0	32.4
Undecided	13.0	8.9
Disagree	4.8	6.4
Strongly Disagree	3.0	4.7
3. If communities provide services to new subdivisions, communities should help decide where they are to be located.	100%	100%
Strongly Agree	28.2	33.3
Agree	50.7	43.9
Undecided	14.5	11.1
Disagree	3.5	6.6
Strongly Disagree	3.	5.1
4. Developers should try to build on land not suited for farming.	100%	100%
Strongly Agree	48.3	53.5
Agree	31.0	27.4
Undecided	14.7	9.4
Disagree	3.4	2.7
Strongly Disagree	2.6	7.0
	Sign. .05	4DF

TABLE 3 cont'd.

Issues	Newcomers	Oldtimers
5. The use of land should be based on what is best for the total community.	100%	100%
Strongly Agree	34.1	43.1
Agree	47.8	38.1
Undecided	10.6	6.4
Disagree	4.9	7.2
Strongly Disagree	2.7	5.3
	Sign. .01	4DF
6. The use of private land should be based on what the owner wants rather than be restricted by zoning.	100%	100%
Strongly Agree	20.0	25.4
Agree	13.9	14.1
Undecided	14.3	14.4
Disagree	30.9	34.6
Strongly Disagree	20.9	11.5
	Sign. .05	4DF
7. Zoning restrictions hurt more than they help an area.	100%	100%
Strongly Agree	9.3	14.7
Agree	9.3	13.9
Undecided	30.5	23.3
Disagree	38.9	37.7
Strongly Disagree	11.9	10.5
8. In the last few years, there has been	100%	100%
too much planning and zoning	22.7	36.2
just enough planning and zoning	28.0	28.9
not enough planning and zoning	49.3	34.8
	Sign. 01	2DF

comprehensive land use plan, the strongest criticisms came from individuals who usually identified themselves as having lived in the community for most of their lives (Neugeboren, 1979). This conclusion substantiates Graber's (1974) observation that the impetus for restrictive zoning in a Colorado community came from newcomers.

To some degree, the negative reaction to planning and zoning can also be traced to the issues of equitable enforcement of zoning regulations, and predictability in land use exclusions. These tap another social issue which has received considerable media attention--trust in government officials. Several survey respondents noted instances where members of the planning commission ignored the recommendations of their staff, or the fiscal court overruled the decisions of the planning commission. But this issue seems secondary to the concern that the local government , through land use planning, is unjustifiably infringing upon the rights of property owners.

Conclusions and Implications

Agrarian county offers some insights into the social consequences of rapid population growth. The growth of Metropolis has had consequences for population change in Agrarian as individuals seek a "country living" within commuting distance of metropolitan amenities (Carpenter, 1976). The increased pace of population growth in Agrarian county has had serious effects on the delivery of public services, especially education and land use patterns. The population changes in Agrarian county have also led to a strengthening and clarifying of the residents' image of their community which has a strong anti-urban bias. While the population change has also provided a reference point for the adoption of comprehensive land use planning as a mechanism for managing growth, this latter event has stimulated new conflicts within the community. Comprehensive land use planning in Agrarian county has not stopped, and does

not seem to have even slowed the pace of population change and residents are now struggling to arrive at a community consensus on future goals. The conflicts focus on if growth can be managed, and if so, how to control growth without infringing on the rights of property owners. It is a debate which every rural community experiencing growth must inevitably confront.

FOOTNOTES

[1]An urban services area is an artificial boundary around the central city area within which urban services (water, sewers, garbage collection, streetlights, sidewalks and road maintenance) will be provided to residents or commercial/industrial enterprises on a fee-for-service basis.

[2]Figures represent the number of respondents citing that reason as "very important to me."

[3]Responses based on the following two questions:

"Suppose you could live anywhere you wanted to, in or near what size community would you most like to live?"

In the country not near any town	21%
In or near a small town (under 2,500)	21%
In or near a town of 2,500-10,000	36%
In or near a small city (10,000-50,000)	10%
In or near a middle-size city (50,000-150,000)	5%
In or near a large city (more than 150,000)	3%
No response	4%

"Considering the size of the community in which you have just said you would like to live, where would you most like to have your home located in that community?"

Near the downtown area	3%
Away from downtown but within city limits	22%
Outside the city limits but close to town	29%
In the country	42%
No response	4%

[4]The goal statements on land use and development practices, and agriculture in the proposed comprehensive land use plan include the following:

> "To protect the aesthetic and cultural character of the planning area as it relates to the existing predominant use of the lands within the planning area for agricultural use...
>
> To recognize the importance of agriculture to the economy and quality of life in Agrarian county and to insure the continuation of agriculture within the county..."

[5]The final draft of the land use plan called for an economic impact statement for major development proposals. These would analyze the public and private, costs and benefits of proposed developments.

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